

The secrets of the mystery shopper

Level 2 • Intermediate

1 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

retailer
assignment

reimburse
scenario

articulate
freebie

nominal
perk

mileage
purse

1. A _____ is a small case in which women carry coins, paper money, credit cards etc. (para 1)
2. A _____ is a company that sells things directly to the public. (para 2)
3. To _____ means *to give back money that someone has spent, particularly on something related to work*. (para 3)
4. A _____ is a situation that could possibly happen. (para 4)
5. A _____ is an informal word for something that you get that you do not have to pay for. (para 5)
6. A _____ is an extra payment or benefit that you get in your job. (para 5)
7. _____ is money paid to someone for the miles they have travelled by car for their job. (para 6)
8. An _____ is a specific task that you must do as part of your job. (para 6)
9. A _____ amount of money is a very small amount that is much less than something is really worth. (para 8)
10. An _____ person can express their thoughts, arguments and ideas clearly and effectively. (para 10)

2 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. How many mystery shopping trips take place each month in the UK?
2. How many stores does a mystery shopper typically visit each day?
3. How much can a typical mystery shopper earn each day?
4. How much can mystery shoppers who film their visits earn each day?
5. How many people have registered as mystery shoppers in the UK?
6. What percentage of mystery shoppers manage to get regular work each month?

The secrets of the mystery shopper

Level 2 • Intermediate

The secrets of the mystery shopper

How would you like to get paid £40,000 a year for shopping? Some mystery shoppers achieve this, but it's not as easy as it sounds

Donna Ferguson

11 March, 2014

- 1 The customer next to you in the queue looks quite normal. But, instead of a shopping list, you notice she's carrying handwritten notes about the appearance and cleanliness of the store. She's been timing the speed of the queue on her phone ... and is that a tiny camera lens in her purse? She's probably a mystery shopper.
- 2 There are approximately 50,000 mystery shopping trips carried out every month in the UK, according to the Mystery Shopping Providers Association, and, as more and more spending takes place online, the demand for mystery shoppers is growing. "Retailers are becoming increasingly aware that shoppers who are prepared to set foot in a physical store want a service and an experience they can't get online," says Simon Boyde, spokesman for Marketforce, which has more than 300,000 mystery shoppers. "Our clients want to measure how well their stores are delivering on that experience."
- 3 "We assign different store locations to each shopper and rotate them so that they never go back to the same shop within three months," says Jill Spencer of mystery shopping company ABA. "Each day, they typically spend up to eight hours visiting five to ten stores, plus another hour or two filing detailed reports on every aspect of their visit." For that, the mystery shoppers can earn up to £155 a day. They are also reimbursed for their expenses. Mystery shoppers who film their visits with a hidden camera can earn even more – around £300 a day.
- 4 Shoppers are usually repaid any money they spend in the stores and may also be allowed to keep the products they buy. "I'm typically given between £5 and £20 to spend at each store, to assess the service I receive at the till," says mystery shopper Laura. "I'm always given a scenario, such as buying something from a specific department or a new product range, but I can often buy whatever I want – and keep it."
- 5 Like most full-time mystery shoppers, Laura is self-employed. Her income is around £30,000 to £40,000 a year and that doesn't include all the freebies she gets on the job. "With the perks, it's enough to live on." She finds it satisfying to return to a store she has previously mystery shopped and see standards have improved. "I know it must be because of my feedback or why would they pay me to give it? Some of the retailers I shop at win awards for customer service and I think that is down to us mystery shoppers. I feel I'm not just doing a service for my company; I'm doing a service for all shoppers everywhere."
- 6 It's estimated that more than 500,000 people have registered as mystery shoppers in the UK, but just 10% or less manage to get regular work each month. This has led to a dramatic reduction in pay. "Once you got a fee, reimbursement for your purchase and mileage, but you now often just receive a contribution towards a purchase," says Val, a 51-year-old former mystery shopper. "I worked for 40 different mystery shopping companies for almost 20 years but I gave up entirely three years ago because I had bills to pay and very few assignments paid an acceptable rate."
- 7 Nowadays, mystery shopping companies mostly give freebies to incentivize their workers. "Marketforce shoppers typically get a couple of pounds for a visit as a token gesture for their time and effort," says Boyde. "At the most, we'll pay £15 to £25 plus reimbursement for, perhaps, a meal for two or a hotel stay. We don't directly employ any shoppers so we don't have to pay them the minimum wage."
- 8 "I'd go on a cruise for nothing," says Laura. "But I think mystery shopping companies that pay you a nominal fee to travel to a restaurant and eat a meal are exploiting people. I won't touch those jobs anymore." There are plenty of people, however, that would. Hannah, a 41-year-old lawyer, has done nearly 500 visits for the Mystery Dining Company in her spare time without receiving

The secrets of the mystery shopper

Level 2 • Intermediate

pay or travel expenses. She carries out their most exclusive assignments, enjoying £200 meals at Michelin-starred restaurants and overnight stays at boutique hotels.

- 9 But there's no such thing as a free lunch, even if you work for a mystery dining company. Hannah says she typically spends two to four hours after each visit writing detailed reports on everything from the quality of the food to specific interactions with staff, whom she always needs to be able to name or describe. She has to

memorize all these details while eating her meal because she cannot openly write anything down.

- 10 "There's lots to remember. You're expected to give feedback while it's fresh, so I've had to get up at 5am to write a report before work. It's a challenging thing to do; you need to be focused, articulate and detail orientated."

© Guardian News and Media 2014

First published in *The Guardian*, 11/03/14

3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text?

1. Retailers pay mystery shoppers to visit their stores.
2. Mystery shoppers go back to the same shop every day for three months.
3. Mystery shoppers can sometimes keep the products they buy.
4. Most registered mystery shoppers get regular work each month.
5. Mystery shopping companies often give their workers freebies.
6. Hannah, the mystery diner, takes notes while she is eating in restaurants.

4 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a three-word verb phrase meaning *go to a place, especially when there is something special or unusual about you doing this* (para 2)
2. a verb meaning *replace people or things in a fixed order* (para 3)
3. a verb meaning *provide someone with the motivation to work hard* (para 7)
4. a two-word noun phrase meaning *an action or decision that is so small that it is nothing more than symbolic* (para 7)
5. a two-word noun phrase meaning *a small hotel that gives a high level of service and is considered fashionable* (para 8)
6. an eight-word saying used to mean *people cannot get something good without working hard or giving something in exchange* (para 9)
7. a verb meaning *learn something so that you remember it perfectly* (para 9)
8. an adjective meaning *concentrating on a particular aim and not wasting time or energy on other things* (para 10)

The secrets of the mystery shopper

Level 2 • Intermediate

5 Two-word noun phrases

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make noun phrases from the text.

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1. shopping | a. service |
| 2. product | b. expenses |
| 3. customer | c. wage |
| 4. minimum | d. hotel |
| 5. travel | e. list |
| 6. boutique | f. range |

6 Word-building

Complete the table using words from the text.

	verb	noun
1.	appear	
2.	reimburse	
3.	reduce	
4.	assign	
5.	contribute	

7 Discussion

- Would you like to work as a mystery shopper? Why? Why not?
- What feedback would you give on the last shopping or restaurant experience you had?

The secrets of the mystery shopper

Level 2 • Intermediate

KEY

1 Key words

1. purse
2. retailer
3. reimburse
4. scenario
5. freebie
6. perk
7. mileage
8. assignment
9. nominal
10. articulate

2 Find the information

1. about 50,000
2. five to ten
3. up to £155
4. around £300
5. more than 500,000
6. 10% or less

3 Comprehension check

1. F
2. F
3. T
4. F
5. T
6. F

4 Find the word

1. set foot in
2. rotate
3. incentivize
4. token gesture
5. boutique hotel
6. there's no such thing as a free lunch
7. memorize
8. focused

5 Two-word noun phrases

1. e
2. f
3. a
4. c
5. b
6. d

6 Word-building

1. appearance
2. reimbursement
3. reduction
4. assignment
5. contribution